

From hospital wards to the Olympics

Two inspiring NSW doctors are carving out medical careers while chasing their Olympic dreams.

Dr Lachie Milne, Canoeist

Being a DIT is hard work, but imagine finishing a 12-hour shift and then training as an Olympic whitewater canoeist. Dr Lachie Milne, a resident at Nepean Hospital, has managed to balance his medical career and passion for canoeing, and will be competing in the Beijing Olympics in August.

Dr Milne has taken the next three months off work to focus on training, which involves three 1.5-hour sessions each day with his canoeing partner of six years, Mark Bellofiore.

Dr Milne has been competing in whitewater canoeing since he was 15 years old. In 1999, he moved from Melbourne to Sydney to try and qualify for the 2000 Olympics.

"I didn't qualify, which is how I ended up doing medicine. Medicine was always something I wanted to do when I was younger. For a period, I only focused on



Drs Kyla Bremner and Lachie Milne

canoeing, and it went off the radar, but when I did decide to pursue medicine in 2000, it was pretty straight forward," Dr Milne said.

Completing his internship at Nepean Hospital, Dr Milne made his canoeing

pursuit known to medical administration staff, who supported him during his study and training.

"It really is a testament to the administration staff and my colleagues at work who covered shifts for me. That is one of the main things that has helped me get through these past couple of years.

"The key has been good communication with people I work with and being organised. At uni, as long as I did the work and passed exams, they were willing to support me."

Dr Milne has also gained transferable skills from both pursuits, and recognises there are aspects in both careers that work together.

"For the doubles event, the communication skills are vital to the success of the crew as a whole. There are a lot of skills I have applied to medicine, particularly the push to succeed and persevere," he said.



Dr Lachie Milne (rear) and paddling partner Mark Bellofiore.



While canoeing is a sporting outlet for Dr Milne, he would never give up medicine to pursue it as a full time career, and thinks having such an outlet is necessary to maintain the work-life balance.

"I do medicine and canoeing for different reasons. Canoeing and sport in general is not something where you sit down and think you have had a constructive day...at the end of the day it is just a game. Some of my competitors find it hard to believe that is my rationale, because their entire life is canoeing.

"I think [canoeing] balances well with medicine because people can get very tied up in the life of medicine. There is a definite scope for life outside medicine, and I think it makes me a better doctor having that balance."

He encourages young doctors to realise the benefits of having extra-curricular activities outside the hospital. After returning to work fulltime, Dr Milne is hoping to specialise in orthopaedic surgery.

"If you are willing to push yourself, the benefits of having something outside medicine, whether it be an athletic or creative pursuit, will give you an outlet in a way you can not possibly imagine.

"Arriving to work at 7am, having already exercised for an hour gives me this ability to be awake for the rest of the day that other people struggle with. I don't need a coffee in the morning because I have exercised."

Dr Kyla Bremner, wrestler

Medicine was always on the cards for Dr Kyla Bremner. However, her passion for wrestling came as a surprise, and when she heads to Beijing she will be competing as Australia's first female Olympic wrestler.

Having just completed her internship year at Bankstown Hospital, Dr Bremner is now overseas training for the games and finds it a welcome break from her previous year.

"Last year was honestly the hardest year of my life and I can't believe I



Dr Kyla Bremner, right

have managed to get through full-time internship, finish on time and qualify for the Olympics at the same time.

"There were days when I would go straight from night shift to training and I'd feel dead on the mat, and it was a bit disheartening. But it is also great training for things like jet lag and a heavy travel schedule. Now I feel like it doesn't matter how tired I am, I know I can still make it through a wrestling session!" she said.

Dr Bremner discovered her passion for wrestling when she was 17 and studying at university in Canada.

"A wrestler living on the same dormitory floor as me invited us to come and watch him wrestle. I was fascinated by the sport, and it was also the first year that a women's division was included in the tournament. I went and knocked on the coach's door and told him I wanted to try wrestling,

"It took me ages to learn the basic moves and get my strength up, but I stuck with it and the coaches were very supportive," she said.

Preparing for a competition involves training twice a day with one half-day and one full day off each week, including three power and weights sessions, three cardio sessions and five on-the-mat sessions of technique or sparring.

"I have had to miss some competitions and training sessions for work. Sometimes I have to miss social events and don't have much time for other

activities. But without my job as a doctor I wouldn't be able to fund my wrestling activities, and Bankstown Hospital has been pretty supportive of me."

Hoping to specialise in dermatology, Dr Bremner knows her wrestling career is limited for time, and is happy to try and manage both careers while she can.

"I know that I will have medicine for the rest of my life, so I don't mind taking some time out of my medical career right now. I think to be successful in anything you need ambition and commitment.

"In both wrestling and medicine you need to have a good rapport with your workmates or teammates to be successful and enjoy the time spent doing it. In both, you need to look after the people around you and support each other to improve and sometimes just survive!"

Dr Bremner finds the balancing act between medicine and wrestling difficult, but encourages interns not to give up everything outside of the hospital.

"You can still work as a junior doctor and have outside interests, and it's important to keep these up even during the really busy runs of work. For me, getting out of the hospital and rolling around on the mat with a bunch of people who know nothing about medicine and simply don't care about it, is the best thing. It clears my mind, and I can forget the job for a few hours. It's great."

Rachel Baugh is the AMA (NSW) Communications Officer